



SAFE PASSAGE



A Newsletter for the Humanitarian Mine Action and Conventional Weapons Destruction Communities

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QRF Bougainville

By Nathan Price, PM/WRA

In May, seven members of the Quick Reaction Force (QRF)* – began clearance operations in Torokina in Papua New Guinea's Autonomous Region of Bougainville. The QRF partnered with the governments of Papua New Guinea and Bougainville to find and clear unexploded ordnance left over from some of the most prolonged fighting in the Pacific during World War II.

Torokina had been a large U.S. and Australian base during World War II, and the site of heavy ground fighting with Japanese forces. These battles resulted in a landscape littered with landmines, explosive ordnance, and abandoned vehicles and planes. Local and national authorities requested U.S. assistance in clearing abandoned and unexploded ordnance (UXO) from the remote area, as the munitions were causing danger to local residents and also being scavenged for illicit use.

After three months, the QRF team has wrapped up its Torokina operation, having collected and destroyed over three tons of ordnance that had been scattered throughout the area. Several large aerial bombs were destroyed where they were found. The team also used mine detection equipment to conduct sub-surface searches of 5,055 square meters of garden plots used by the four local schools, to ensure the areas are clear of dangerous UXO. Community liaison and development work by the QRF team medic included training local health care workers and providing them with additional medical supplies. Local constables observed the team in action, and were trained and equipped to be able to identify various types of UXO and to use GPS units to mark and report future UXO finds.

The immediate aims of this mission were to conduct UXO clearance operations to lessen the danger to local residents and reduce the possibilities for scavenging explosives for illicit use. Beyond those goals, the mission also sought to reinforce cooperation and collaboration between the national government of Papua New Guinea and the Autonomous Bougainville Government on shared humanitarian and security issues. The dedicated work of the QRF team members, as well as the warm hospitality of the Torokina residents, made possible the accomplishment of all of these goals.

*The QRF has also assisted in Bulgaria (see May 2009 Safe Passage at <http://www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/nwslter/123318.htm#story2>).



PM/WRA's Quick Reaction Force destruction team with Torokina locals in crater after demolition.



Destruction of World War-II era munitions in Torokina, Bougainville, Papua New Guinea.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF CHARLIE HOLLWAY, DYNACORP

Handicap International is Clearing the Way for Stability

By Brandon Sternquist, PM/WRA

Years of support by the United States and other donors for humanitarian mine action in Senegal's Casamance region have led to a significant decrease in dangers from landmines and explosive remnants of war (ERW), and the safe return of many persons displaced by earlier rounds of fighting. However, the rate of deaths and injuries from landmines and other ERW, while low overall, continues to experience tragic spikes. After decades of conflict between the Senegalese military and the Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC) rebels, some landmine and ERW contamination, possibly aggravated by fresh fighting, continues to threaten the civilian population. Through grants from the Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement (PM/WRA) in the Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, Handicap International is restoring safe access to land and infrastructure in the region's Niaguis and Nyassia districts and helping to create an environment where peace has a better chance to take hold.



displaced peoples and refugees to their homes and villages. PM/WRA's and Handicap International's collaboration also enables reconstruction and development efforts such as one in the locality of Kaguite, a former palm tree field that was used by local farmers to produce palm oil before the area was mined. The mines and the resulting fear they caused in local farmers has led to continuing decreases in the productivity and utilization of these lands. Thanks to Handicap International's clearance of the land, it will become accessible and productive again.

Since the project began in September 2009, Handicap International has recruited and trained six local demining technicians while maintaining their ongoing landmine clearance operations throughout Casamance. With the additional deminers supported in this 2009 grant, landmine clearance in Nyassia increased from 900 to 1,600 square meters of land per week. These ongoing clearance operations are benefiting over 2,000 men, women, and children in Kaguite. PM/WRA plans to continue to support Handicap International's vital work in the Casamance region.

Handicap International has worked in Senegal since 1996 and in Casamance since 1999. It continues to be actively engaged in landmine survey and clearance operations as well as mine survivors assistance and risk education programs in almost 60 countries. For more information on Handicap International, visit <http://handicap-international.us/>.

New and Retiring Partners



The **Landmine Relief Fund** was founded in 2004 by William Morse, a California businessman, to support the work of an all-Cambodian demining nongovernmental organization, **Cambodian Self-Help Demining (CSHD)**. CSHD was founded by a former child soldier, Aki Ra, who spent nearly 15 years clearing ERW in his country. CSHD works with other

former child soldiers in mine-affected villages throughout Cambodia. For more information, visit www.landmine-relief-fund.com.

Legacies of War is a U.S.-based non-profit organization whose mission is to raise awareness about the history of the Vietnam War-era bombing in Laos and advocate for the clearance of unexploded ordnance, provide space for healing the wounds of war and create hope for a more peaceful future. Since its founding in 2004, Legacies has integrated art, culture, school lesson plans, community organizing and advocacy to work with Laotian-Americans, bombing survivors, veterans and others to establish a credible voice for healing and reconciliation. For more information, visit www.legaciesofwar.org.



As the PM/WRA Public-Private Partnership Program for Mine Action continues to add new partners, we want to mark the passage of two of our oldest partners, Adopt-A-Minefield and Survivor Corps (originally Landmine Survivors Network).

Adopt-A-Minefield (AAM) was created over ten years ago, and received support from PM/WRA for its initial start-up efforts. Our continued partnership increased awareness of its signature annual event, "Night of a Thousand Dinners." Past Secretaries of State Madeline Albright and Colin Powell hosted partnership recognition events at the Department of State to commemorate "Night of a Thousand Dinners" and U.S. Embassies in mine-affected and donor countries also got involved, providing genuine support and collaboration over the past decade. With AAM's December 2009 cessation of operations, we wanted to salute AAM's leaders for all they accomplished with the support of private donors and the U.S. Government, among others. Importantly, AAM's closure is yet another indicator -- besides reduced annual casualties -- that together, we're making progress toward solving the global landmine problem.

Landmine Survivors Network, co-founded in 1997 by landmine survivors Jerry White and Ken Rutherford, evolved into **Survivor Corps** in 2008. Focusing on the unique capabilities of conflict survivors, LSN/SC developed peer support, community building and rights advocacy networks, helping landmine survivors and other survivors of conflict around the world. As SC winds down operations this fall, James Madison University's Center for International Stabilization and Recovery will house the peer-to-peer support program and continue to partner with organizations in Burundi, Colombia, Rwanda, Uganda and other countries. We applaud Survivor Corps for giving voice to the special needs of landmine survivors and their families in international treaties and are confident that the community will continue to be well-served.

IMCO and Iraqi Artists are Turning Weapons into Art

By Brandon Sternquist, PM/WRA



(Above and below) Creative sculptures made with pieces of demilitarized conventional weapons by the Iraqi Mine Clearance Organization.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF DENNIS HADRIK, PM/WRA

Since its creation in 2003, the Iraqi Mine/Unexploded Ordnance Clearance Organization (IMCO) has cleared and destroyed 8,148 anti-personnel and 4,461 anti-tank landmines, 149,068 pieces of unexploded ordnance, and 37,974 small arms/light weapons (SA/LW) in Iraq. The organization has also provided mine risk education to over 4,000 people. Now IMCO has begun a new enterprise which will transform the weapons they continue to disassemble and destroy into works of art.

IMCO has begun a partnership with graduates of the Baghdad University's College of Fine Arts to transform gun barrels, rocket launchers, and other SA/LW into works of art. The project, which was pioneered by a group of Baghdad University graduates, has allowed artists to carve, blowtorch, and mold the wooden and metal pieces of demilitarized weapons. These unlikely pieces of art have included a bust of Queen Nefertiti carved into the butt of a rifle and a dragonfly sculpture created from the barrel of a machine gun. Through this partnership, IMCO and Iraqi artists are taking weapons, which were once tools of destruction, and using them as a source of inspiration.

Iraqi artists and IMCO will be opening a gallery to display the art created in April, 2010. The proceeds from the sale of the art pieces will support orphanages that care for Iraqi children who have been victims of landmines and explosive remnants of war. best practices related to the reduction and "right sizing" of stockpiles.

United States Attends Ottawa Convention Review Conference in Cartagena

The United States sent an observer delegation to Cartagena, Colombia, for the Second Review Conference of the Ottawa Convention, November 30 to December 4, 2009. The interagency delegation was composed of humanitarian mine action experts from State, DOD, USAID, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. It was headed by James F. Lawrence, Acting Director, Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement in the Department of State's Bureau of Political-Military Affairs (in photo, left, below right), and Steven R. Costner, PM/WRA Principal Deputy Director (in photo below at left).



PHOTOS COURTESY OF KERRY BRINKERT, MINE BAN CONVENTION IMPLEMENTATION SUPPORT UNIT, GICHD

Golden West Humanitarian Foundation Explosives Harvesting Program

By Nathan Price, PM/WRA



Anti-tank mine opened using the Remote band Saw Method.

On May 1, 2009, the Golden West Humanitarian Foundation (GWHF) marked its fourth anniversary by producing its 100,000th disposal charge under the Explosive Harvesting Program (EHP). EHP is a strategy GWHF has developed to “kill two birds with one stone.” Outdated munitions are cut open to extract their explosive contents. The explosives are used to create charges that are given for free to partner organizations such as HALO Trust, MAG, and the Cambodian Mine Action Center (CMAC), which in turn use them to destroy landmines or other dangerous unexploded ordnance (UXO).

The benefits of such a strategy are numerous. First, old munitions can be demilitarized so that they are no longer a threat. This reduces the likelihood of accidental stockpile explosions and reduces environmental damage caused by bulk ordnance demolition. Second, the metal casings that enclose the explosives can be returned to the Royal Cambodian Armed Forces for recycling.

Third, as a capacity-building operation, CMAC EOD operators can be brought in to work at the EHP to gain familiarity with different types of munitions and to develop their understanding of EOD work in a controlled, quasi-classroom environment. While taking a break from the field, the CMAC EOD operators can participate in focused, high intensity training exercises and mission rehearsals. “When the EOD Teams return to the field, they’re able to handle a far broader range of targets than prior to their rotation,” says Len Austin, EHP EOD Supervisor. Last, but not least, are the charges themselves. 100,000 charges can efficiently destroy even greater numbers of explosive hazards, as a single charge can be used to eliminate a cluster of unexploded ordnance in many cases. Now that’s fighting fire with fire.



100-gram charge created by the casting process.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ROGER HESS, GOLDEN WEST HUMANITARIAN FOUNDATION

Myths vs. Reality of Landmine Casualties

Many individuals and organizations dedicated to mitigating the effects of landmines and explosive remnants of war are still using ten-year-old figures when disseminating information about the global landmine problem. Actual figures are much lower.

A widely accepted source for casualty data is the International Campaign to Ban Landmines’ Landmine Monitor, whose 2009 edition states, “In 2008, Landmine Monitor identified 5,197 recorded casualties caused by mines, explosive remnants of war (ERW), and victim-activated improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Of these, 1,266 people were killed, 3,891 injured, and the status of 40 people was unknown.” (For more details, visit http://www.the-monitor.org/index.php/publications/display?url=lm/2009/es/mine_casualties.html.)

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